



Gold King Mine Emergency Response

FAQs

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY • REGION 8 • AUGUST 2015

What caused the discharge of contaminated water to the Animas River?

On August 5, 2015, an EPA team working to investigate and address water contamination at the Gold King Mine in San Juan County, Colorado, unexpectedly triggered a large release of mine waste water into the upper portions of Cement Creek, a tributary of the Animas River.

The blowout occurred at approximately 10:30 a.m. There were several workers at the site at the time of the breach, all were unharmed.

How much water was discharged?

Initial estimates are that the release contained approximately one million gallons of water (estimated from the dimensions of the mine adit (tunnel)) that was held behind unconsolidated debris near an abandoned mine portal.

What is EPA doing to address the problem?

EPA contacted local officials and helped ensure that drinking water sources were protected.

EPA began sampling water by 6:00 p.m. on Aug. 5. EPA is rebuilding settling ponds to treat the ongoing discharge. The upper pond will be completed by early afternoon August 7, and the lower one by August 8. EPA has adequate supplies of treatment materials (caustic soda and flocculent) on-site to provide treatment once the ponds are rebuilt.

EPA will continue to:

- Sample water and monitor the plume,
- Collect and present data to the community,
- Coordinate with federal, state, tribal and local entities,
- Provide status updates to officials and the public.

What are the risks to human health posed by the contaminated water?

Anyone who comes into contact with the contaminated water should take a shower to remove contaminants.

EPA is coordinating with Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), in response to public health concerns or questions associated with the mine waste plume. ATSDR has been in communication with local health officials at San Juan County Basin Health Department in Colorado. Public health questions/concerns should be directed to Chris Poulet, ATSDR/R8 at 303-312-7013.

What resources are being deployed to address the discharge?

As of Aug. 7, 38 EPA employees and 15 EPA contractors have been deployed to the site.

What water quality data is being collected?

EPA and others have amassed an extensive historical data record of water quality at the mine and downstream in Cement Creek and the Animas River. Comparing data being collected as part of the emergency response to this historical record will give us an indication of the spill's impacts.

EPA will be posting its raw data as well as data summary reports on its website (www.epaosc.org/GoldKingMine) as they become available. EPA should begin receiving sampling results on Aug. 7.

For additional information, please contact:

Cynthia Peterson

EPA Community Involvement Coordinator
800-227-8917 ext. 312-6879
peterson.cynthia@epa.gov

or visit:

www.epaosc.org/GoldKingMine